

WORKING TITLE: Social Landscape Assessment of Browns Canyon National Monument

Browns Canyon National Monument

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Executive Summary

In fall 2016, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) initiated two complementary processes to elicit public perspectives on the social, economic, environmental, and resource conditions of the Browns Canyon National Monument landscape. The intent was to better understand what is important to individuals, local communities, and other stakeholders; foster positive federal-state-private working relationships; and offer the public early and engaging opportunities for meaningful participation with regard to the Browns Canyon National Monument landscape.

The agencies engaged the Consensus Building Institute, a impartial nonprofit that helps groups collaborate, to conduct a stakeholder analysis and situation assessment that would assist the agencies in understanding the public's values, interests, and concerns related to the Browns Canyon National Monument. Simultaneously, USFS and University of Colorado at Colorado Springs hosted a series of six public listening sessions in communities in the Arkansas River Valley and the Front Range, as well as an online listening session. The listening sessions utilized a method called Human Ecology Mapping, which links social and spatial data.

To bring Browns Canyon National Monument to fruition, by law and presidential direction, BLM and USFS in cooperation with Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) must develop a management plan for the monument. The data and findings derived through the situation assessment and human ecology mapping will inform the planning process for developing a national monument management plan.

This report summarizes the situation assessment and human ecology mapping methodologies, findings, and recommendations; synthesizes the findings of the two approaches; and examines the benefits of using both tools in tandem.

Methodology: Situation Assessment

To understand and reflect the variety of perspectives on Browns Canyon National Monument, CBI conducted 15 confidential stakeholder interviews with 21 individuals representing range of stakeholder interests from the local community, urban users, "friends of" groups, recreation, grazing, environmental, water, mining, local business, and local and state government. During interviews, CBI invited participants to articulate their values, interests, and concerns related to the present and future conditions of Browns Canyon National Monument and suggestions for the management planning process and outreach.

Interview Findings

Findings reflect stakeholder feedback on values, hopes, and concerns associated with the Browns Canyon National Monument landscape, including the critical issues and the process.

- Interviewees deeply appreciate the unique experience that the Browns Canyon National Monument landscape offers: rugged, remote, and solitude away from development.
- Interviewees describe a range of quality recreation opportunities available in the monument: rafting, hiking, walking horseback riding, camping, and rock climbing.
- Interviewees emphasize the need for a balance between providing access to the monument while maintaining opportunities for quiet and solitude that characterize the Browns Canyon landscape.
- Interviewees recognize that the designation creates special considerations for managing Browns Canyon as a monument.
- Interviewees point to the challenges of regulation and enforcement. Monument status may create a need to actively manage activities, and enforcement in such a remote area can prove challenging.
- A number of interviewees identify local economic impacts (opportunities and challenges) of the monument designation.
- Stakeholders recognize the need to secure funding for county road improvements.
- Interviewees widely recognize the importance of a collaborative management approach among the agencies, “friends” groups, and other partners.
- Interviewees recommend a wide range of communication channels for engaging stakeholders effectively.

Recommendations for Future Engagement

The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) specifically invited participants to identify opportunities and tools to share information and engage stakeholders interested in Browns Canyon National Monument. CBI also developed a database of interested parties and stakeholders for future outreach purposes. These recommendations are intended to inform the planning process and enhance the opportunity to listen, identify, and compile public views. CBI recommends the following strategies for planning and engagement:

- Design a multimedia approach effective for reaching stakeholders. Browns Canyon enjoys diverse stakeholder who are active on social media, participate in organized groups, and others who read the local paper.
- Engage Browns Canyon local neighbors through in-person workshops and community meetings.
- Create online opportunities for learning and contributing to the management planning process. Strong online participation for the human ecology mapping and national interest in the monument indicate that online webinars and engagement can provide opportunities for input.

Methodology: Human Ecology Mapping

USFS and BLM hosted six listening sessions in communities in the Arkansas River Valley and the Front Range, with a total of 133 participants. In addition, an online listening session generated 178 responses. The listening sessions included open discussions about place connections, the importance of Browns Canyon National Monument, and special features that draw people to the monument. Collectively, listening session participants mapped 644 resource interactions and identified 312 special places. Findings reflect the following key themes:

Landscape Connections - Participants shared a variety of ways that they connect with the landscape. Several participants were ranchers who had lived in Chaffee County for multiple generations and leased land adjacent to the Monument. Some were raft guides who had moved to the area in the 1980s and stayed on to raise families and run outfitting and guiding businesses. Another subset of participants would be considered frequent repeat visitors – people who enjoy Browns Canyon and return several times throughout the year for outdoor recreation or specialized activities, such as gem collecting. Participants also included newly arrived retirees, seasonal residents and second homeowners, and a subset of wilderness advocates, some of whom had never been to Browns Canyon. People shared their stories and provided rich descriptions of their relationships to the place and to the landscape.

Special Qualities of Browns Canyon - Participants were asked what makes Browns Canyon a special place. The responses received paint a picture of a highly accessible place with diverse recreation and heritage opportunities as well as scenery, unique geology, springs, gulches, wildlife, and riparian systems. The most prominent feature of Browns Canyon was the Arkansas River, which seems to be the backbone of the Monument. However, many lauded the solitude found on hiking trails and off-trail in the backcountry regions of the Monument. Others talked about the historical resources, particularly the railroad and the ghost town (Turret).

Resource Interactions - Participants drew on maps with markers to describe the places in the Monument that they like to visit and the activities they engage in while they are there. The most common activities were viewing nature, hiking, observing wildlife, photography, relaxing, camping, and rafting. The highest density of areas that participants mapped were located along the Arkansas River, Ruby Mountain, Hecla Junction, Turret, and Aspen Ridge Road.

Special Places - Participants identified their top 3 favorite places on the Monument using sticker dots. The most prominent places mentioned included: Arkansas River, Ruby Mountain, Hecla Junction, Aspen Ridge, and the Turret area. The most frequent landscape values were attached to these special places included recreation, scenic quality, relaxation, and solitude.

Management Ideas and Concerns - Participants offered numerous comments and suggestions about how to improve management of Browns Canyon. Some requests were made for facilities improvements in high-use areas. Others were concerned about providing more recreation infrastructure, which could potentially attract more visitors. Some talked about the need to regulate commercial rafters due to the increase in commercial boat traffic and challenges for recreation boaters to find pieces of solitude. The desire to provide recreation opportunities and cater to visitors while protecting the area's social and natural conditions. Access was another major theme. Some were concerned that the new Monument status would reduce access for traditional and historic users of the area.

Synthesis of Methodologies

Despite differences in scale, scope, and focus of the two methodologies, many of the same themes emerged in both the situation assessment and the HEM approaches. The fact that two distinct approaches were used to elicit ideas about Browns Canyon and the same set of themes emerged from both approaches gives them added weight. We identified 10 themes in particular:

- Desire to share the wonders of Browns Canyon with visitors, but concern about impacts to the biophysical and social environment from over-use, spillover, or dispersal of visitors into new territories (social trails, dispersed camping sites.)
- Desire of local communities who depend on resource-based industries (recreation/tourism, grazing) to maintain a viable source of revenue while also having a level of visitation and residential growth that is sustainable for nearby communities.
- Desire to have adequate and ample facilities to manage high-density areas (e.g., Hecla Junction, Ruby Mountain) and to accommodate a diverse range of uses, but to emphasize low-developed, 'primitive' sites to provide more dispersed or rugged experiences without facilities.
- Desire to expand and improve trails and river facilities to accommodate a variety of recreation users (motorized, equestrian, mountain bikers, seniors, ADA), but also provide places in the Monument that are harder to reach, where solitude can be found.
- Desire for commercial river outfitters to provide quality visitor experiences, but for recreational boaters and fishers to also have opportunities for using the river without being crowded.
- Desire for a balance between traditional and historic resource uses (grazing, logging, prospecting) and recreation-based industries (fishing, whitewater boating, hiking) and amenities.
- Need to address concerns of adjacent private landowners and the issue of visitors wandering off-trail and trespassing on homes near the Monument (especially Turret area).
- Specific concerns for developed facilities at high-use sites (put-ins, trailheads, campsites) where crowding is causing challenges for parking and sanitation and

raising concerns for visitor safety and satisfaction; rooted in a desire to help visitors launch their journeys in a way that is safe and satisfying.

- Recognition of the Monument's historic and cultural heritage resources and a desire for targeted management of these areas, including restoration and interpretation (mining, railroad).
- Recognition of the Monument's potential as a place for learning, discovery, and environmental education. The Monument's compact and accessible nature as well as the uniqueness and diversity of wildlife, geology, history, culture, and recreation opportunities make this area an ideal learning laboratory.

Conclusion

This report summarizes a pilot approach to integrate collaborative planning methods early in anticipation of developing the Browns Canyon National Monument management plan. This study relied on two processes: the stakeholder situation assessment and human ecology mapping. The situation assessment approach gathered information as a part of a larger set of processes and events in the region and addresses questions about 'the who?' 'the what?' and 'the why?' The human ecology mapping approach strongly emphasizes the geographic context and answers questions about 'the where?' 'the how?' and 'the when?' Taken together, these two approaches weave a rich tapestry that shows the connections, the colors, and the textures of the Browns Canyon social landscape and will contribute to the USFS assessment of the planning area and BLM's analysis of the management situation for Browns Canyon National Monument.